

# John's Gospel - Long Distance Miracles

by John Vissers

---

*Faith is born in the midst of crisis and is tested as it grows, but genuine faith perseveres in the midst of life and trusts in God's sovereignty and goodness.*

**Duration:** 38:34

**Scripture:** John 4:43-49

**Topics:** "Gospel Of John"

---

## Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the story of Jesus healing the royal official's son in the fourth chapter of John's Gospel. The speaker emphasizes that this miracle is intended to inspire faith and trust in God. The story shows that faith can be born in the midst of a crisis, as the official desperately seeks Jesus' help for his dying son. Through stages of faith, the official comes to fully believe in Jesus as the Savior who brings life not only to his son but also to his entire family. The speaker challenges the audience to reflect on their own stage of faith and where their focus lies.

---

## Transcript

Now tonight we come to our Bible reading, which is the last section of the fourth chapter of John's Gospel, and I invite you to turn there now. This is the account of Jesus healing the royal official's son, and it brings to a conclusion the fourth chapter of John's Gospel. Most of chapter 4 has been taken up with the encounter between Jesus and the woman at the well, the conversation which ensued as a result of that encounter in Jesus' ministry to the Samaritans.

And now, immediately following that episode, we see that Jesus goes to Cana in Galilee, and there he is approached by an official. So let us hear the word of God at chapter 4 and reading at verse 43. After the two days, that is, the two days he had spent in Sychar with the Samaritans, he left for Galilee.

Now Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honor in his own country. When he arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him. They had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, for they also had been there.

Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum. When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death.

Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders, Jesus told him, you will never believe. The royal official said, Sir, come down before my child dies. Jesus replied, You may go.

Your son will live. The man took Jesus at his word and departed. And while he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living.

And when he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, The fever left him yesterday at the seventh hour. Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, Your son will live. So he and all his household believed.

This was the second miraculous sign that Jesus performed, having come from Judea to Galilee. Amen. May God bless to us this reading from his word tonight.

Let's pray together. Lord, we are grateful for your word tonight, for its instruction, for its inspiration, for its comfort. We thank you for your infallible written words.

Speak to us, we pray, through it. Teach us what you would have us to know, to learn, and also teach us how to apply these words in our own faith and in our own life, that the reality of grace might indeed find a home in our hearts. For we ask it in the name of Christ.

Amen. As some of you know, when I graduated from seminary some 17 years ago, it's hard to believe that it's been that long. My only consolation is that my brother Wayne here graduated at the same time.

We've both been out of seminary about 17 years. And when we graduated, back in those days, we were not free to go wherever we wanted to go. In terms of ministry, we were appointed somewhere.

Wayne was appointed to Three Hills, Alberta, of all places, to pastor the Presbyterian Church there. Can you imagine pastoring a Presbyterian Church where Prairie Bible Institute is the main thing that goes on in the town? That's where he went. And I was sent off to beautiful British Columbia, to neo-pagan North Vancouver, where I was assigned to work with St. Andrew's St. Stephen's Church in North Vancouver in an effort to begin a new work on the eastern edge of North Vancouver, the Deep Cove area, to do some church planting and to be involved in some other ministries there.

One of the things that I got involved with there, and some of you have heard me talk about this before, was the hospital, Lionsgate Hospital. And in fact, I served one day a week as part of that ministry as the chaplain on the children's ward at Lionsgate Hospital. And it was a very formative experience for me in terms of my own ministry, in terms of dealing with the realities of the families and the children that I was asked to work with.

There I encountered the pain and the sorrow of families who were struggling with seriously ill and sometimes even dying children. And I would often, while I was on call during the week, receive a phone call at home in my study and be asked to come quickly to the hospital to deal with some emergency. And a number of these emergencies left an impression on me.

On one occasion, I was called at home to come, and to come quickly. And when I got to the children's floor, I was met by a father. And this father, they were there, he and his wife, with a number of their children, but they had a three-year-old son.

And he was cradling his three-year-old son in his arms, and they had just discovered that the boy had an inoperable brain tumor and that it would only be a matter of weeks, perhaps even days, before he would die. And I will never forget, as long as I live, the look on the face of that father as he spoke to me. It was a look of pain.

It was a look of deep anguish, a look of utter helplessness. And I don't think that there is any greater anguish than that of a parent for a sick or for a dying child. I've conducted a lot of funerals in my 17 years as a minister of the gospel, but the most difficult are always those where you are standing with parents as they bury their children, sometimes young children, sometimes even adult children.

Somehow the most difficult funerals are those when parents are burying their children. Somehow this is not the way it's supposed to be. This is not the way life is supposed to go.

And the question, of course, is at moments like that, what does it mean to believe in God? What does it mean at moments like that to have faith? What does it mean to trust in God at moments like that in your life? If you can identify with that feeling tonight, if you can enter into that experience, then I suggest to you that you can begin to understand the feelings of the royal official who's described for us at the end of the fourth chapter of John's gospel. This royal official who came to Jesus at Cana in Galilee. He was a man in anguish.

He was a man in pain. He was a man who came to Jesus out of a crisis. Now just in order to set the context here, let's be reminded that Jesus had spent two days in Sychar ministering, preaching, teaching to the Samaritans at their invitation.

After the woman at the well had gone back into town to tell them of her experience of this man who told her everything that she had ever done, her life had been changed. And she shared that with her fellow Samaritans. And so Jesus stayed there and ministered for two days.

When those two days were over, he finally then made his way into Galilee. He arrived home. And when he arrived, the people welcomed him.

But the story moves very quickly to focus on Cana in Galilee, where Jesus is approached by this royal official whose son was sick in Capernaum. And this man comes to Jesus, and he literally, and the language here is compelling, he literally begs Jesus to help him. Sir, come down before my child dies.

At first, the response of Jesus seems to be one of rebuke. But the man is persistent, and out of his anguish persists to ask Jesus to help him. And Jesus tells him to go because his son will live.

And in verse 50, we're told that the man took Jesus at his word and started home. And while he was still on the way, his servants met him to say that his son was alive. Now, the Gospel writer John tells us that this is the second miraculous sign which Jesus performed.

The first miraculous sign, according to John the Gospel writer, occurred also in Cana of Galilee. It occurred in chapter 2, where Jesus turned the water into wine at a wedding. And these two miracles, it's interesting to note, occur in the same place, in Cana in Galilee.

And they're described in the same way as miraculous signs, as signs which are intended to point people to Jesus Christ and to engender faith within them. In fact, a number of commentators have noticed the parallel between these two events in John 2 and in John 4. First of all, both miracles contain an initial

rebuke to the one who requested it. Do you remember back in chapter 2, that rebuke was to Mary, the mother of Jesus? She's first rebuked by Jesus, her son.

In the second case, it is now the royal official, this father who is in anguish. Secondly, in each case, the miracle is performed at a distance. Jesus doesn't do anything but speak, and it is done.

He speaks, and the water is turned into wine. He speaks, and this royal official's son is healed. Thirdly, it's interesting to note that in each case, the servants are the first to know, and to recognize, and to see, and to experience the miracle.

In John 2, it's the servants who first notice that the water has been turned into wine. In here, it's the servants who report to the father that the son has been healed. And then finally, each miracle concludes with a statement about faith.

The people who knew about this miracle believed in Jesus. And it's this last point, which I think we need to dwell on this evening, because this miracle is really intended as a sign of faith. It's really intended to engender faith, and it's that point we want to dwell on tonight.

What does this story teach us about faith? About what it means to have faith, about what it means to trust in God, about what it means to really understand and to know, to believe in times that really matter. The first thing I want us to notice as we think about this theme of faith on the basis of this text is that here, faith is born in the midst of a crisis. And that's very clear in verses 46 and 47.

I've pointed out already the similarities between the miracle in Cana, which is described in John 2, the turning of the water into wine at the wedding, and this healing miracle in John 4. But we also need to understand that there is a tremendous difference here. There is something which sets these two miracles apart. There's something that we need to notice.

The first miracle occurs at a time of great joy, at a time of great celebration, at a time of great happiness. The faith of the disciples in John 2 is strengthened. They are given faith at a celebration, at a wedding.

And so in that context, there's a tremendous sense of celebration and festivity. But the picture here is entirely different. Because this scene is fraught with sickness, desperation, anxiety, and indeed the terrible shadow of death hanging over.

Both of these experiences generate faith. Both of these miracles generate faith in those who experience them. But the one is so different from the other.

Faith is born, and faith matures amid many different circumstances of life. It's also important to understand that the father who came to Jesus is described as a royal official. Now this probably means, in terms of the way he's described here in John 4, that he was on Herod's payroll.

That he was some kind of a civil servant who worked for Herod, who wielded a great deal of power. We're not even sure whether he was a Jew. He may well have been a Roman.

He may well have been a Gentile. We're not told. Now Herod, of course, was the puppet ruler who was controlled by the Romans.

And as one of Herod's officials, this royal official, this man, would have been a person of power, would have been a man of prestige, would have been a man of influence, and no doubt a man of great wealth.

He would have been used to getting his own way. He would have been someone who knew what it was to give orders and to get his own way.

He would have been high-powered. He would have known how to get things done. He would have known his way around.

But here he is in Cana. And his son is some 20 miles away in Capernaum. We're not told why he's in Cana.

Did he come just to see Jesus? Or was he in Cana for some other business and heard about Jesus and came to see him there? We're not told, but what we are told is that his son is dying in Capernaum. And that they didn't expect him to live much longer. And suddenly you see this royal official, this man with all this power, with this influence, with political connections, suddenly all of these things don't mean anything because he can't help his son.

And he knows it. Suddenly everything that his life is about can't help him at this critical moment. At this pivotal moment when his son lays dying some 20 miles away.

It doesn't matter if he's a person of substance. It doesn't matter if he has political connections. It doesn't matter if he knows how to get things done.

It doesn't matter if he has influence. It doesn't matter if he can order people around. Because now his world is consumed by this one overwhelming reality.

His son is dying and there's nothing he can do about it. And so he seems to be willing to try anything, even to come to this Galilean rabbi named Jesus. Now this is not faith.

Not yet. But it is the beginning of faith. This is still, at this point, a desperate act born out of a father's love for his son.

And it's not rooted really yet in any real knowledge of Christ. But it is the beginning of faith because this father, you see, has come to the end of himself. He has nowhere else to turn but to Jesus.

And I want to suggest to you tonight that that's often the beginning of faith for many of us. But faith often begins when we come to the end of ourselves. When we come to the end of our resources.

When we come to the end of all those things that we can draw upon to solve the crises that face us. But when we come to the end of all of that and when we face something that we can't any longer manage ourselves, then often when we have nowhere else to turn but to Jesus, faith is born. And isn't that the experience of many people? Some people face illness, either themselves or the illness of a friend or family member or loved one.

And they don't know where to turn. Some people are confronted by death. They lose someone they love.

And suddenly everything that mattered to them doesn't seem to amount to very much because someone has been taken. Or perhaps it's when we lose a job. Or when a relationship or a marriage breaks apart.

Where do you turn when these things happen? Because all of the things usually that you've counted on in life no longer seem to provide the resources to deal with that kind of a situation. And suddenly all the things that you depend on aren't there anymore. Your world is blown apart.

And I find in my work day in and day out that every day I meet people like that. That we are living in a world increasingly where people are finding the things that they counted on they couldn't count on anymore. And they come to the end.

And particularly when a crisis emerges, where do you turn? I have a friend, a very good friend, who has just gone through the worst two years of his life. It began almost two years ago, actually a little over two years ago, when his father died in January of 1996. And then about 11 or 12 months after that his wife walked out on him and their four children after almost 20 years of marriage.

And then, if that were not enough, earlier last year his mother died as well. And he's an only child, an only son. And he described it to me this way.

He suddenly realized that every significant relationship he had in his life, aside from those of his own children, his parents, he's an only child, his wife, everything had been taken away from him. What do you do when that happens? What do you do when your life falls apart, when your world is blown apart? Now, he's a believer. And it has been a tremendous test and trial for him in the midst of his own life at this point that he speaks about the faithfulness of Christ and about a deeper sense of faith that he's experienced even in the midst of all of that.

Where do you turn when your life is blown apart in that kind of a way? This royal official comes to Jesus. And then, secondly, notice that faith is often tested as it grows. In verses 48 and 49, the royal official here has taken a big risk because he's come to Jesus to ask him for help.

But Jesus' initial response appears to be a rebuke. Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders, you will never believe. This seems to be a rather harsh response.

But notice that the you here is plural. And it's almost as if Jesus is not talking simply to this man, but he's talking past this man to all of those who are gathered there, to a larger body of people whose faith depends on the miraculous. You see, this is a theme which emerges again and again throughout John's Gospel, that the true basis of faith is not the miraculous itself.

It's not what Jesus can do for you. It's not some spectacular thing that Jesus does. It's not some emotional feeling that he stirs up within you.

But rather, these miracles are intended to point people to Jesus in a more profound way so that they can enter into a relationship with him and trust him at every point of life, not just at the point of crisis. And it's interesting, of course, in John's Gospel that those who follow Jesus because of the miracles alone don't stick it out to the end. And we'll see that later in the next few chapters of John's Gospel.

They can't handle the real call to faith and discipleship. Now, Jesus often responds in this way to people in the Gospels, and it kind of takes you back at first. It appears like a harsh response.

If you think, for example, in Mark chapter 9, where there's a father who brings his son to Jesus to be healed of an evil spirit, and the disciples couldn't heal him at first, and Jesus rebukes the disciples and gives a word of rebuke before he deals with the father, and that happens a number of times. And Jesus is always downhearted by the lack of faith that he sees even in his own disciples, and he's also concerned, of course, by what motivates people to come to him. Is this royal official just someone who wants to see Jesus do something? Or is there something more going on? Well, the royal official persists.

He's motivated by the anguish of a situation and his belief that Jesus can help, and perhaps that only Jesus can help, and we hear these words, Sir, come down before my child dies. You see, faith that is born, faith that is genuine, faith that is born out of real need, faith that is focused on Christ, will begin to emerge, will begin to grow, will begin to persevere in the midst of life. And that kind of faith does not look for easy answers.

This royal official persevered with Jesus, and faith takes another step, another step forward. In one of his books, Leith Anderson, who pastors a church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, tells a story about a couple who came to see him, about their child who was desperately ill. And they talked about their love for their son and how hard it was to see him suffer.

And then they told him about several people who had called them, telling them of nontraditional remedies that were sure to cure their son, others telling them and giving them religious advice, spiritual advice, saying something like this, your son will be healed if you have enough faith. Have faith and he will get better. It's not ultimately up to the doctors.

It's up to you. If you don't have faith, your son will die. These parents loved their son desperately, and they desperately wanted him to recover.

And though they loved God, and though they believed that God had the power to heal, they didn't feel that they had the kind of faith that was being demanded of them. And they were struggling with their sense of guilt, with their sense of guilt that their son might die because of their shortage of faith. There's always that kind of teaching out there, isn't there? And they wanted to know from Leith Anderson, does God really operate that way? I mean, is God in the business of killing children because their parents don't have enough faith? And Leith Anderson assured them that this was not the case.

And he tried to point out to them that the real object of true faith is not the miracle itself, but the God who is to be trusted in the midst of it all. That faith required of them to believe that the Lord was with them no matter what the circumstances of life or even death itself. That no matter what God's will was, to trust in the Lord at every point of life.

That's the kind of faith that Jesus is interested in. Not faith in simply a miracle, but faith that learns to trust in him at every point of life. And sometimes I think that we look at faith as some kind of a bargain that we make with God, and if somehow we keep up our end of the bargain, then God will keep up his end.

But faith is not something we give to God in order to get something in return. It's not something we use to manipulate God. It is that which enables us to trust in God at every step along the journey of life.

No matter what the circumstances, whether God heals or God doesn't, whether God intervenes in the way that we think he ought to or whether he doesn't. And that's the kind of faith that Jesus is interested in. And the kind of faith that is often tried and tested amidst the circumstances of life.

And then notice thirdly that faith, on the part of this royal official, is a response to the word of Jesus in verses 50 to 52. Verse 50 is really the fulcrum of this story. The whole story turns upon what happens in verse 50.

Jesus tells the man that he may go, because his son will live. There's no magic here. There's no spectacular show.

There's no lengthy prayer. Jesus simply tells him, Go. Your son will live.

And then we see the man took Jesus at his word and departed. He jumps out in faith. He takes a risk.

He believed in the word of Jesus and he leaves for Capernaum. I mean, what must have been going through his mind here? Here this man he's never met before, this Jesus of Nazareth, this Galilean Jew, this rabbi, to whom he's come to ask for help, says to him, Go. Go home.

It's done. Your son will live. But he believes.

He takes Jesus at his word and he starts to head home. And suddenly the story moves from death to life. And the key element in the transition is faith in the word of Jesus.

The father starts with a faith based on the wondrous character of the miracles and now moves to a hope for a son based on the word of Jesus. And Jesus' word is unfettered by spatial or temporal constraints. He speaks and it is done.

And in a marvelous way we are reminded, aren't we, of the first chapter of Genesis itself, where how does God create the world? He simply speaks it into existence. He doesn't create it by working hard and fashioning it in various ways. He speaks and it is done.

And here Jesus speaks and it is done. Can we trust the word of Jesus? You see, that's what faith comes down to. Can we trust the word of Jesus? Do we have faith that Jesus is who he says he is? Do we have faith that Jesus can do what he says he can do? Do we have faith in the scriptures that these are indeed the words of God given to us? Can we trust in that way? Jesus invites us to trust in his word, to take him at his word whatever our circumstances in life.

And then finally notice that the faith is confirmed. It leads to an even fuller understanding in verses 53 and 54. The father realized that Jesus was true to his word.

His son had been healed at the exact time that Jesus spoke. His servants come out to meet him. They tell him that his son is alive, that he's well.

When did it happen, he asks. They tell him at the seventh hour, about one o'clock in the afternoon. And to his astonishment, and perhaps even to his delight, he realizes that that's the exact time at which Jesus had spoken.

His word came to fulfillment. And this man now realizes that Jesus' help is not limited to his son alone. That this man who has healed his son has so much more to offer.

It was not enough to thank Jesus and then move on in his life. This demanded a greater response. And the text says that the royal official and his whole household believed.

He'd been convinced that Jesus offered salvation. And again, the words echo from the end of the previous paragraph where the Samaritans say, Jesus is the savior of the world. That phrase appears for the first time in John's gospel there where now we have this royal official with faith in Jesus.

His whole household, together with him, believed. He now recognizes Jesus for who he is. For what he has done, for what he can do.

And the miracle is a sign which points him to the identity of Jesus as the savior of the world. You see what's happened here? I don't want to psychologize this text in a way that's inappropriate. But there is a development of faith here.

There are stages of faith through which this man has gone. From the crisis of his life, from an act of desperation, to an initial sensing that Jesus can help him. Now, to taking Jesus at his word, to experiencing the miracle and to realizing that Jesus is savior.

Jesus brought life to his son. But by bringing life to his son, he also brought life to him and to his whole family. What a marvelous story.

And my question to you this evening is simply this. What stage of faith are you at tonight? Where is the focus of your faith? You may be facing a crisis in your life and you're not sure where to turn. You may be looking for a miracle.

You may be finding that you're in a period of testing and trial. What stage of faith are you at this evening? Whatever it is, Jesus invites you to focus on him and to trust in his word and to find life in him in the midst of your own life tonight. One of my favorite stories, and I've told it before, is the story about Martin Luther and Martin Luther's daughter Magdalena, who was 14 years old when she was taken sick.

And when she was dying. And Luther prayed, he prayed, O God, I am her father, and I love her so, and I want her to be healed, and I want her to be well, and I want her to live. But nevertheless, not my will, but your will be done.

And then he turned to his daughter and he said, Magdalena, would you rather be with me, your human father, or would you rather go and be with your father in heaven? The girl said, Father, it is as God wills, for we trust in his word. And Luther held her in his arms as she died. And as they laid her to rest, he said, O my dear Magdalena, you will rise and shine like the stars in the sun.

How strange to be so sorrowful, and yet to know that all is at peace, that all is well, because we trust in the word of the Lord. That's faith. Do you have that kind of faith tonight? That kind of faith that can sustain you? Do you walk by faith and not by sight? Do you trust in God, in life and in death, that you belong to him, your faithful Savior, Jesus Christ? Let us pray.

Lord, we believe. Help our unbelief. Teach us to have faith.

And whatever our circumstance tonight, teach us what it means in practical ways to have faith in the midst of our lives. Lord, we thank you for your grace. We thank you for what you did in the family of that royal official so many years ago, not only healing their son, but bringing them all to faith in yourself.

Do it in our lives, in our families. Tonight we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

---

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/26/SID26638.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-vissers/johns-gospel-long-distance-miracles/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**